



NEWS RELEASE

Media Contact:

Sarah Ardalani
Public Information Officer
213-974-3525
SArdalani@da.lacounty.gov
Twitter: @LADAOOffice

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Man Convicted in Murder-For-Hire Cold Case

A 42-year-old man was convicted yesterday afternoon of a 1992 cold case murder, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office announced.

The jury deliberated for a day before finding Leon Martinez of Yucaipa guilty of first-degree murder in case VA116931.

Jurors also found true special circumstance allegations of lying in wait and murder for financial gain. A special allegation that the defendant personally used a handgun also was found to be true.

A sentencing hearing is scheduled for April 14 at the Los Angeles County Superior Court in Norwalk. Leon Martinez faces a possible maximum sentence of life in state prison without the possibility of parole.

The defendant's wife, Evangelina Martinez, 36, also was charged in the same case with one count of conspiring to dissuade a witness. She pleaded no contest in an open plea to the court. The open plea means a sentence was not negotiated with the District Attorney's Office. She is scheduled to be sentenced on April 3.

Deputy District Attorney Robert Villa, who prosecuted the case, said on July 23, 1992, Vicki Ghonim, 17, was in a car with her infant son and husband at Creek Park in La Mirada when an unknown person walked up to their vehicle. The person attempted to rob them, and then fatally shot her.

The case remained unsolved for more than 15 years. In 2009, authorities received a DNA hit that linked Leon Martinez to the killing. He was arrested on Oct. 20, 2010.

Evidence presented during the trial revealed that the victim's husband paid Leon Martinez \$500 to stage a robbery and carry out the murder.

At some point, the defendant reportedly disclosed to an ex-girlfriend the details about the planned killing. Leon and Evangelina Martinez attempted to discourage the ex-girlfriend from testifying in court about the admission.

The prosecutor said the victim's husband has not been charged in connection with the case, however, the matter remains under investigation by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

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About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to seeking justice for victims of crime and enhancing public safety. Last year, the [Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office](#) prosecuted more than 71,000 felony defendants and nearly 112,000 misdemeanor defendants.